

On Saturday, I joined fellow veterans at my Northbrook office for a meeting of the Tenth District Veterans Advisory Board. Attending were veterans from World War II, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, Iraq and representatives from veterans assistance organizations. While my service in the Naval Reserve helps me continue to stay involved with care for our military personnel, the Veterans Advisory Board provides an unfiltered look into the issues facing those who wore the uniform.

Together we addressed the biggest issues confronting our nation's veterans. We discussed legislation currently in Congress which will help reduce the backlog for compensation and disability claims in the VA. We also discussed the recommendations of the Dole-Shalala Commission Report to improve care for veterans in the wake of revelations about care at Walter Reed. Finally, we reviewed the recently released Government Accountability Office's report on the state of care provided to our returning service members.

A great deal of time was spent discussing the future of the North Chicago Veterans Affairs Medical Center and its transition to the first-ever joint Navy/VA Federal Health Care Facility. I joined local veterans groups in their fight to keep the VA open after a consultant recommended that the North Chicago Medical Center close in 1999. Now, nearly a decade later, we are expanding the facility and services to provide unrivaled care to our sailors and veterans.

It is because of our veterans that the North Chicago VA Hospital is open and expanding today. We owe a debt of gratitude to people like Johnnie Allen, Phil Mazur and countless others who fought for improved care for those who put their lives on the line for their country.



Congressman Mark Kirk, 10th District Veterans Advisory Board and Congressional Medal of Honor winner Phil Mazur.